

# BIA preparing study of shipping costs to remote Alaska villages

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WASHINGTON—The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is preparing a study for the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to determine shipping costs for supplying remote villages on Alaska's northwest coast.

The report will provide the basis for a decision on whether the BIA will continue to provide the resupply service, contract to a commercial carrier, or propose an alternate method to the service now provided by the ship the North Star III.

Sen. Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, who is urging that the shipping service can be continued has informed the BIA he will support its request for authorization and funding when it is prepared to submit a request to congress.

"This is a vital service which is the life support system for the many villages which are cut off from population centers," Gravel said.

A study conducted last year by the BIA's Planning Support Group recommended that the program be continued, but also concluded that the present ship, the North Star III, will last for only four or five more years. The BIA is now compiling a detailed economic analysis of the entire North Star program.

OMB said such information is needed before a decision can be reached on what should be done about the North Star III.

Gravel said he hopes the BIA analysis will conclude that the

service should be continued. "To discontinue the North Star's operation would be doing a great disservice to the people of Alaska's coastal villages," he said.

Since 1922, with the exception of the war years, a government ship has steamed north from Seattle with supplies for villages along the Gulf of Alaska, the Bering Sea and the Aleutian Islands. The North Star III is the fourth such ship.

Because commercial vessels cannot economically serve the small coastal villages, the North Star has provided an invaluable service for approximately 70 isolated villages. The ship delivers to those villages such things as: fuel oil; building supplies; light generating plants; wares for Native stores; BIA schools and housing, medical supplies for Public Health Service facilities and goods for Northern Churches.

At sea, the North Star performs further services for the villagers of northwestern Alaska. She has rescued barges, plucked seal hunters from stormy seas, and trained Natives for maritime service.

The villagers want these services to continue and Gravel

is giving them his full support. "There may come a day, when the Native corporations have devised their own supply system, that the North Star is no longer needed, but that day has yet to arrive," Gravel said. "Today the North Star program is vitally needed. I will do everything in my power to see that it is continued, and I am sure the BIA will recommend such a continuation."

The North Star also guarantees delivery to the villages it serves. The ship will wait days for bad weather to break so cargo can be unloaded. In comparison, commercial ships will wait only 48 hours. Gravel said guaranteed delivery is one of the items he wants to see the BIA continue,

no matter what method of supply is chosen.

Other services performed by the ship's crew comprise a long list. On request, the crew will install bulk tanks, or put ashore

crawler tractors to repair roads. They will repair radios, electrical wiring, plumbing systems, and other items. While there is a charge for services performed by the crew, the rates are reasonable.